

## Romancing the Foam No. 113

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It is sometime in the mid-70's and I am smuggling parrots. Not intentionally. I've been in a campground on the north end of Mazatlan and need to head north. I meet Gregg in a bar in between the campground and the train station and he offers me a ride as far as Guaymas – about 9 hours by car north. Gregg has a beige ford pickup with a matching camper shell on the back. Gregg is a tile setter from Phoenix. He

goes to swap meets in Phoenix and picks up small appliances, polaroid cameras, transistor radios and other small electronic items. Mexico has huge tariffs on electronics and Gregg can usually get a reasonable assortment across the border. Gregg explains to me that a guy can make a living off a polaroid camera in Mexico selling shots of tourists. You can open a restaurant with a handful of small electric appliances and a blender can become an agua fresca or raspado business. A few times a year Gregg heads south searching for lilac-crowned parrots and white-fronted parrots – both popular as pets and Mexican Reds will do in pinch. He can pick up a parrot for an electric frying pan and a camera which cost him a few bucks and sell the bird in Phoenix for \$600 or more depending on age and kind. Four or five parrots pay for a nice vacation and help with the expenses back home.

By about 30 minutes north of Mazatlán I learn we in fact have 4 parrots in the camper when Gregg stops the truck to tend to them. He keeps a towel over each cage, so they shut up and think it's night time. It's a leisurely drive sharing 12 packs of Tres Equis and Pacifico as we work our way through Sinaloa and it's mostly desert. I don't remember if we had a joint, but I know the truck smells like we did. Today la Cártel de Sinaloa based in Culiacán and formerly headed by Chappy Guzmán is one of the most powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world. In the late 60's and 70's Pedro Avilés Pérez pioneered drug smuggling in the area and focused primarily on using airplanes and boats to smuggle marijuana north. His organization would eventually evolve into la Cártel de Sinaloa. Gregg and I pass the Culiacán police pound and it is acres of airplanes, Jeeps, Land Rovers, and boats. We note that Pedro must be doing well to have millions of dollars' worth of equipment seized by the police and still be in business.

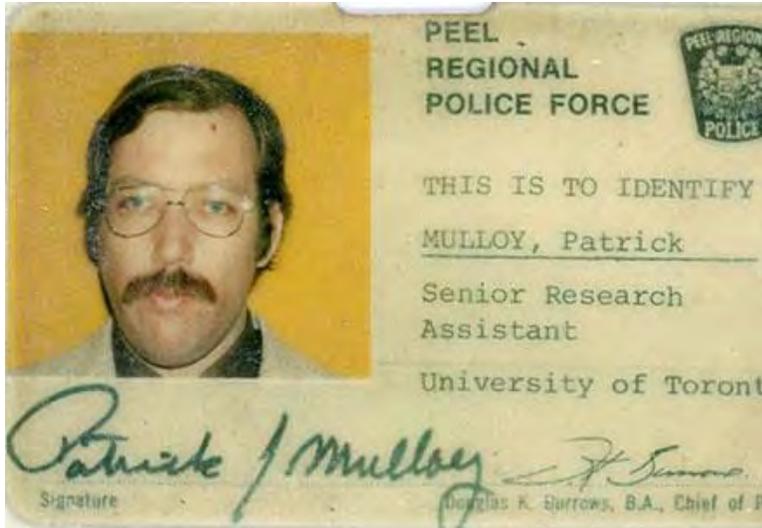


Traffic has been thin all day but just north of Culiacán it begins to congest and we notice military vehicles, soldiers, machine guns and other indicators that it might just not be our day – it is a random military check point. We are using an ice chest of beer as an arm rest between us, we smell like pot and we have a small flock of parrots – probably illegal – being smuggled into the US in the back. As we wait

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in line, I try to calculate the length of our prison sentences. I have bribed (la propina) my way out of jams in the past in Mexico but this strikes me as much bigger than the amount of money I have in my wallet or bank account.

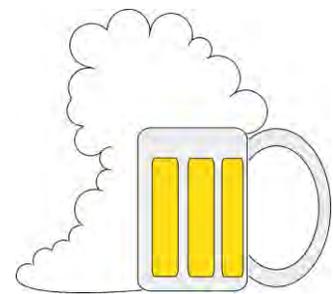


We are stopped. Two guys in military fatigues with rifles stand watch while a less formal dressed guy goes through the cab, asking Gregg questions and then finds some bullets in the glove box and this is a really big deal because guns and bullets in private hands in Mexico are extremely illegal. Our interrogator tells us as much. I am fumbling for my papers and my police ID – I am a researcher – not a real cop – falls out of my wallet and our interrogator picks it up and says something like

“hermano!” (brother) and Gregg explains that he and I are cousins and I am a Canadian cop and he is a Phoenix cop and that we visited the gun range before we came to Mexico and forgot and left the bullets in the glove box and so on and it is complete bullshit but our interrogator suddenly becomes our best friend. Our new best friend asks us to show him and his crew how we search cars in Phoenix and Canada. Our new friend and his gun toting amigos direct us to a VW Bug and tell us to show our stuff. Their choice of car is fortuitous. I have owned three such cars, know how to take them apart and know every conceivable hiding place. Gregg and I take out the seats, disassemble the door panels, look inside the hubcaps, examine the heater and vents and in the end discover some oranges which for some reason turn out to be contraband and this delights our new friend. After some small talk about policing in Canada and Mexico we have hugs all around and they send us on our way.

Because of delays – we also have a flat which takes a mechanic 4 hours to fix by hand – I arrive in Guaymas in the middle of the night, find a torta de jamon and a Tres Equis and end up in the cheap train car with the chickens and goats and interesting people on my way back to Nogales. I walk across the border and somehow miss the whole Customs and Border patrol thing. I find the bus station, hop on a northbound dog and I am on my way home.

I am commemorating my parrot smuggling experience first with De Cam Geuzestekerij Oude Lambiek De Cam. It is a lambic and one of the best beers in the world and an appropriate beverage to pay homage to my experience. My first De Cam Geuzestekerij Oude Lambiek De Cam, I had in 2012 and I had to order it from Belgium. I drank it the year after it was bottled, and it was flat but very good. It had 4.8% alcohol by volume. I picked my latest bottle up at South Lyndale Liquor a couple of months ago. Like the first, De Cam aged this Oude Lambiek for three years before bottling. It has 5.0% alcohol by volume. This is 5 years past its bottle date and unlike the first, it is highly carbonated, pouring amber gold with a slight haze and kicks up a 2" off-white to light cream-colored foam cap that after five minutes is still a thick,



clinging film inside the glass. Rapidly rising bubbles fill the glass. This smells tart and funky with some wet leather. The wet horse blanket and barnyard aromas are medium to medium low underneath fruit, over ripe fruit and some dark sugar aromas. The flavor comes on medium to medium high citrus to almost vinegar tart softened by a trace of brown sugar, stone fruit, citrus, and some very pleasant barnyard funk. The beer has hints of bread crumb and traces of subtle oxidation flavors that only add to the character of the beer. The flavors are complex and layered. A trace of sweetness dries on the finish with some oaky, tannic astringency. Oude Lambiek De Cam is very effervescent, creamy, refreshing, elegant and tart. My current bottle of Oude Lambiek de Cam is vastly different from the first - I suppose like a toddler is different from an infant - but they are both absolutely delightful and both are what you

want to drink when you want to be really nice to yourself. I rate them both 100. I really want to drink this beer with a nice runny wheel of Epoisses but I have yet to find the beer available when I can find the cheese at the appropriate level of ripeness.

My parrot smuggling travel companion Gregg showed an uncanny ability to shoot from the hip and probably helped us avoid a lot of pain with his concocted story. Someday I will drink Eastlake Craft Brewery Shoot From The Hip (8.5% alcohol by volume) in his honor. It is a Belgian IPA where New World hops meet Belgian yeast. It pours brilliant chestnut with a light copper tint from a bomber into a tulip and produces a finely bubbled 2" ecru foam cap that takes 3 minutes to reduce to 1/3 its original size. The foam marks the glass with fine gothic window lace. The aromas are ripe fruit, plums, faint over ripe fruit, caramel and a trace of onion and bread crumb. It has big fruit flavors, tropical fruit, passion fruit, tangerine, citrus, and a trace of caramel quickly recede leaving citrus and a moderate bitterness with malt in the background. An initial light sweetness fades, leading to a drying finish. This yeast forward beer has a healthy hop accent. The bitterness has an herbal, almost gin like character. Tropical fruit and pear flavors grow as the beer warms. A slightly below medium body has slightly above medium



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carbonation and a very creamy and soft texture. This well-made and well balanced Belgian IPA rates 85.



OMNI Brewing Company Loonacy (8.0% alcohol by volume, 45 International Bittering Units) sums up the entire parrot smuggling experience. In urban slang loonacy refers to a cross between a loon and a doofus and I think our enterprise certainly has an aspect of that. I imagine the loon in loonacy as paying homage to the birds who behaved admirably during the stop. I cannot imagine what would have happened to us if the parrots decided to start squawking during the stop and search. Loonacy is a Belgian Golden Strong Ale. Tart, ripe fruit lead the aromas. The second whiff reveals stone fruit, a hint of tobacco, traces of banana, light bread crumb, traces of lactic acid and bubble gum. Yeast aromas are medium high, malt aromas are medium and hop aromas are low. A 2" lacy white blanket of foam with good retention and a very fine bead tops a slightly hazy gold column. Moderately bitter malty caramel starts the flavors

joined by rich fruit, peach, and banana. It is mildly sweet but dries out finishing fruity with a balancing bitter and a hint of tobacco. The finish reminds me of marmalade. The beer has just a touch of Brett in it or the brewer has found a very interesting Belgian yeast strain and has treated it very well. The yeast flavors are medium high, alcohol flavors are medium, the hop and malt flavors are medium low, and the hop bitterness is medium plus. The texture is exquisite. The body is medium light, dry and creamy with medium high very soft carbonation. The alcohol is mildly warming and not hot or harsh. I am enjoying this beer. It combines a rich texture with complex, layered flavors and a fruit-filled palate followed by a pleasant balancing bitterness. I rate it 85.

By this morning it had snowed 18" and it is early evening and it is still snowing. These beers transport me back to a time when I smuggled parrots and it was warm and exciting. Try one and see if it does the same for you.